

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

May 18, 2005

DEFOREST WETLANDS: FINAL DESIGN

File No. 04-005

Project Manager: Christopher Kroll

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$200,000 to the Los Angeles County Flood Control District to complete design plans for wetland creation along the Los Angeles River as recommended in the *DeForest Nature Center and Sixth Street Sites Wetland Feasibility Study*.

LOCATION: East side of Los Angeles River, City of Long Beach, Los Angeles County (Exhibit 1)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: March 25, 2004 Staff Recommendation

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31000 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) to the Los Angeles County Flood Control District (FCD) to complete design plans for the DeForest Wetlands project. Prior to the disbursement of any funds, FCD shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program, including scope of work, budget and schedule, and the names of any contractors it intends to use to conduct the project.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes and criteria set forth in Chapter 6 of the Public Resources Code (31251-31270) regarding enhancement of coastal resources.

2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff is recommending that the Conservancy provide a grant of \$200,000 to the Los Angeles County Flood Control District (FCD) to complete final design and engineering for wetland creation in the DeForest (also known as Market Street) storm water detention basin along the Los Angeles River. The proposed project is a priority project on the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project's Work Plan and would, with the adjoining FCD wetland creation project at Dominguez Gap East Basin, create two miles of wetland and related habitat along the Los Angeles River. Funding is needed to complete design and engineering for the DeForest project. The DeForest and Dominguez Gap projects are separate but related wetland restoration projects. FCD is the lead agency for the Dominguez Gap project and the City of Long Beach (Long Beach) is the lead agency for the DeForest project but FCD is overseeing design development for both projects.

The Conservancy, FCD and the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC) funded the preliminary design development and environmental review for both projects, and these tasks will be completed by December 2005. FCD has secured grant funding to complete design and engineering for the Dominguez Gap project. Staff is recommending that the Conservancy match funding from Long Beach and the RMC to complete design development for the DeForest project. FCD would continue to manage both projects through to completion of the design and engineering phase.

Open water, wetland, riparian, and scrub habitats will be planned in a two-mile corridor along the east side of the Los Angeles River. Wetland loss along the Los Angeles River has been staggering, with 51 miles encased in concrete for flood control and urban development to the river edge. Both the DeForest/Market Street and Dominguez Gap basins were identified as potential sites for wetland restoration in *Wetlands of the Los Angeles River Watershed: Profiles and Restoration Opportunities*, a study prepared by the Conservancy in 2000. Recognizing that the highly urbanized landscape prevents restoration or creation of wetlands to the extent they once existed in the watershed, the Conservancy study concluded that providing a representation of the historic distribution of wetlands resources and hydrologic conditions is very valuable.

Public facilities including trails, overlooks, gates, benches, and signage would help meet the need for open space and encourage public access to the coast. Residents from the neighborhoods and schools bordering the basins would gain park space and educational opportunities once the project is built. A bike path along the river levee connects communities to the coast.

Site Description: The DeForest/Market Street detention basin and Dominguez Gap East Basin Spreading Grounds form a contiguous, two-mile corridor along the east side of the Los Angeles River (Exhibit 1). The corridor averages 300 feet in width. The basins comprising the corridor are owned and operated by FCD.

The DeForest/Market Street Basin is a detention basin for flood control. The DeForest Nature Center is located at the north end and consists of an extensive area of planted woodland and a nature trail. Water enters the basin from local storm drains and is pumped into the Los Angeles

River by the Market Street Pump Plant. Open and weedy cover with only a small amount of native vegetation characterizes the central and southern reaches of the basin.

The Dominguez Gap Basins are operated for storm water retention and as spreading grounds for infiltration. Water enters the East Basin from a diversion from the river and local storm drains. Excess flows can be pumped back into the river by the Dominguez Gap Pump Station, or transferred via siphon to the West Basin for infiltration into the aquifer.

Project History: Both the DeForest/Market Street and Dominguez Gap basins were identified as potential sites for wetland restoration in *Wetlands of the Los Angeles River Watershed: Profiles and Restoration Opportunities*, prepared by the Conservancy in 2000. Staff explored Long Beach's interest in creating wetlands in the DeForest/Market Street Basin. The City's Parks, Recreation and Marine Department was interested in the opportunity, as well as the Water Department, which initially wanted to harness the wetlands to treat water for reuse. In February 2000, the Conservancy authorized a \$300,000 grant to Long Beach to conduct a feasibility study (Exhibit 2). Completed in summer 2002, it demonstrated that wetlands, trails, and new public-use facilities to support passive recreational and educational activities could be developed.

Independently, in February 2001, FCD completed a feasibility study for the Dominguez Gap Spreading Grounds and concluded that the Spreading Grounds could be modified to allow a continuous flow of water to create year-round aquatic habitat for native wetland and riparian plant species. Complementary enhancement of existing trails and access points, as well as construction of new public-use facilities to support recreational activities such as bird watching, nature study, hiking, cycling, horseback riding, and environmental education activities could also be included.

Since the City of Long Beach and FCD were ready to conduct design and environmental review for preferred alternatives from their feasibility studies, they agreed to proceed jointly with the next phase. The Conservancy authorized a \$400,000 grant to FCD for preliminary design for the DeForest/Market Street project and environmental review for both projects. Joint design has ensured that the habitat, recreational elements, and infrastructure are complementary across the neighboring basins. FCD and Long Beach have worked cooperatively to oversee development of preliminary designs for both project sites.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$200,000
City of Long Beach	100,000
Rivers and Mountains Conservancy	<u>100,000</u>
Total Project Cost (this phase)	\$400,000

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds for the current authorization is an appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 40). Consistent with the purposes of this funding source, the proposed project would be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Conservancy's enabling legislation and would involve restoration of land and water resources and matching funds are being provided by the City of Long Beach and the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

See March 25, 2004 Staff Recommendation (Exhibit 2).

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

See March 25, 2004 Staff Recommendation (Exhibit 2)

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

See March 25, 2004 Staff Recommendation (Exhibit 2)

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

See March 25, 2004 Staff Recommendation (Exhibit 2)

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed project is statutorily exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 in that it involves information collection to prepare a final project design and engineering drawings. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the proposed authorization.